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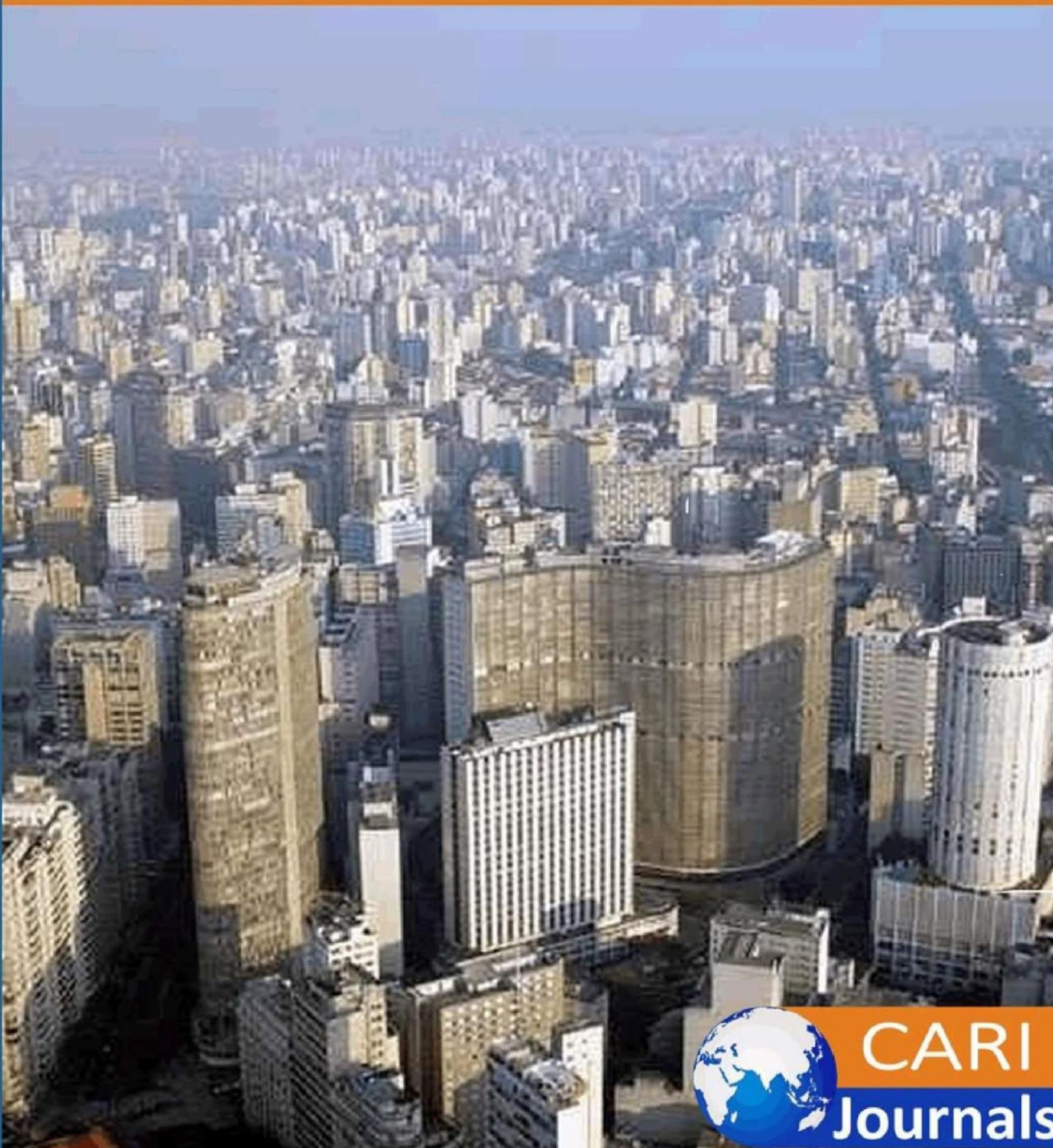

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Poverty Reduction Interventions' Key Success Factors. A Literature Review and Respective Implication on the Fight against Poverty in Zambia

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to identify key success factors vital for the success of poverty reduction interventions. This was prompted by high poverty levels in Zambia despite poverty reduction programs in place.

Methodology: Content and thematic analysis was used to review literature particularly on studies done in countries which recorded success in poverty reduction such as China.

Findings: The identified key factors were high inclusive growth, low inequality, innovative tailor made poverty reduction interventions and adequate/significant level of intervention and coverage. Zambia poverty reduction strategies were devoid of these factors resulting in constrained effectiveness of the interventions.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Architects of poverty reduction interventions should therefore strive to ensure that the identified key success factors for poverty reduction are incorporated for interventions to be effective.

Keywords: *Poverty, Poverty Reduction, Success Factors, Economic Growth, Inequality, Inclusive.*

Introduction

Poverty is one of the global challenges. As a result, poverty is usually the first item on the global agenda. This was highlighted in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which ran from 2000 to 2015. Goal number one on the MDGs was to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger with the milestone being halving global extreme poverty by 2015. According to the MDG report (2015) the number of people living in extreme poverty globally declined by more than half, falling from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015. This was at the global level but some individual countries especially in sub Saharan Africa failed to halve extreme poverty during the same period. Poverty is again goal number one under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) running from 2015 to 2030. Goal number one under the SDGs is to end poverty by 2030. However, it is noted that some countries especially those in sub Saharan Africa still have over half the population leaving in poverty.

Poverty has main facets with no universally accepted definition due to its multidimensional in nature. The United Nations however, focuses on poverty determinations using monetary means determined objectively through poverty lines. The current International Poverty Line stands at \$2.15. This was adopted in 2022 by the World Bank based on the 2017 Purchasing Power Parity. The implication therefore is that all persons surviving on less than \$2.15 per day, regardless of which country they reside in, are considered to be poor. Using the International Poverty Line (IPL), countries can be compared in terms of poverty levels

Poverty has existed even during the early days of human civilisation. Ravallion (2016) submitted, in reference to the ancient view, that poverty was not widely seen as a matter for the secular world of laws, taxes, and public spending but as pre-modern concept of distributive justice which emphasized meritocracy and the assignment of rewards according to merit. This had its origins around 350 B.C. in the writings of the Greek philosopher and scientist Aristotle. Aristotle thus wrote;

"*For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient: from the hour of their birth, some men are marked out for subjection, others for rule.... It is clear, then, that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and just. (Aristotle's Politics, 350 B.C., bk. 1, pt. 5)"*

Ravillion (2016) in quoting Francois Bourguignon and Christian Morrisson (2002) estimated that 84% of the world's population in 1820 lived in what they term "extreme poverty." today. According to Ravillion (2016), in the early 18th century, the focus was to maintain status quo between the wealth and the poor. It was normal to have slaves toiling to serve the wealthy and this status quo was maintained. Insights to challenge the status quo started in the late eighteenth century at the dawn of economic transformation through industrialization in Britain. Distributional conflicts became severe in the lead up to these momentous changes with poverty and inequality probably rising. This brought about mounting concern about prospects for social instability and even rebellion among the working class and also frustration among the middle class about the constraints faced on upward mobility. The masses started to question long-standing excuses for the deprivations they faced. Significant cracks had started to appear in mainstream views on the role of the state in influencing distribution. A key step in philosophical thinking was the rejection of the view that prevailing inequalities were inevitable (Ravillion, 2016). This gave birth to the possibility of the state to play a part in distribution. In philosophy and economics, the 1960s and 1970s according to Ravillion (2016) saw renewed questioning of the classical utilitarian paradigm as a basis for public action against poverty and inequality, and in other domains of public policy. Public attention became more focused on poverty around 1960 and a significant shift in economic and philosophical thinking was underway focusing on antipoverty policies. As a result, about 1.5 billion people, who would have been poor in the absence of the 1960 break, became none poor.

Poverty is currently on the top agenda of all nations as reflected in the MDGs and SDGs where poverty eradication was the number one goal for both. Current data according to the World Bank (2023) indicate that the number of poor people reduced globally from 2,016 billion in 1991 to 659 million in 2019. This is attributed to the role governments have been playing in resource distribution. It was however noted that despite all governments focusing on the fight against poverty as shown through the commitment to the global agenda under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), success in the poverty fight has been varying. Some countries, especially those in Southern Africa, have the least rate of poverty reduction whereas as some Asian countries are on the blink of eradicating poverty. It therefore becomes worthwhile to critically look at the interventions in successful countries for possibilities of identifying factors contributing to such success with a view of unsuccessful countries adopting some of the Key Success Factors.

Review of literature

In order to get insights on effective poverty reduction interventions, it is appropriate to review efforts by countries under East Asia and the Pacific. This is because of the tremendous efforts made by these countries in the fight against high poverty levels. World Bank (2023) indicate that poverty rates in countries under East Asia and Pacific reduced from 84% in 1981 to 1.2% in 2019. Hatta & Ali (2013) reviewed poverty reduction trends, policies and strategies for Malaysia where poverty levels reduced from 49.3% in 1970 to 3.8% in 2009. Malaysia is one of the countries under East Asia and the Pacific. The reduction in poverty levels where attributed to the enabling equitable opportunities for all citizens and the provision of a social safety net for the disadvantaged groups. Chatterjee (2005) looked at poverty reduction strategies aimed at coming up with lessons from the Asian and Pacific Region in terms of inclusive development and poverty reduction. Chatterjee (2005) highlighted the key success factors promoting poverty reduction as inclusive high economic growth reinforced with appropriate policies such as policies aimed at reducing inequalities. High economic growth was also supposed to be supported by utilization of local resources such as use of local savings for investment and focusing on sectors with high poverty reduction potential. (Wan &Wang, 2018) attributed fast growth to have contributed significantly to poverty reduction in Asia. Fosu (2017) did an assessment on the relationship between growth, inequality, and poverty reduction focusing on developing countries and concluded that on average, income growth had been the major driving force behind both the declines and increases in poverty and that high initial levels of inequality limited the effectiveness of growth in reducing poverty while growing inequality increased poverty directly for a given level of growth. World Bank (2022) highlighted that China accounted for 75% of global reduction in poverty levels in the last 40 years. The report indicated that the number of people in China with incomes below US$1.90 per day had fallen by close to 800 million people in the last 40 years. The World Bank report reflected that between 1978 and 2019, the proportion of people living in poverty, based on the national 2010 standard, fell from 97.5 percent to 0.6 percent of the rural population. The poverty headcount dropped from 770 million to 5.5 million people. Measured by the US$1.90 poverty line (2011 purchasing power parity), the headcount poverty rate dropped from 88.1 percent in 1981 to 0.3 percent by the end of 2018 in China (World Bank, 2022). China managed to reduce high poverty levels through the use of two major approaches to poverty reduction. The first approach focused on broad-based economic transformation to open new economic opportunities aimed at raising average incomes. The second approach was the recognition that targeted support was needed to alleviate persistent poverty. This was done by initially providing support to areas disadvantaged by geography and the lack of opportunities and then later to individual households (World Bank, 2022). This was in the midst of rapid and sustained economic growth and effective governance which catalysed the entire process. Liu et al (2017) did an assessment of China's poverty alleviation over the last 40 years in order to look at the successes and challenges. The following were noted as being responsible for rapid poverty reduction in China; reforms and opening up policies as well as poverty reduction through economic development, effective government leadership in poverty reduction through multiple social forces, improving the self-development ability of the poor population and decreasing the generational poverty transmission and the final one being Innovating new ways of poverty alleviation at different stages of poverty alleviation. Ayoo (2021), provided a summary of poverty reduction strategies namely stimulating inclusive economic growth, focus on economic and institutional reforms, promoting microfinance institutions and programs, improving the marketing systems and promotion of cash/income transfer programs. World Bank (2022) report on poverty and shared prosperity advocated for stepping up the fight against poverty and inequality for developing countries through fiscal measures on three fronts namely targeted cash transfers instead of broad subsidies, prioritization of public spending for long-term growth and mobilization of tax revenues without hurting the poor. Cobbinah et al (2013) acknowledged different perspectives on the concept of poverty and called for the adoption of local level indicators when addressing poverty in developing countries and that developing countries should focus on overcoming deprivations and lack of access to basic services as well as ensuring stable political and economic environments, and sustainable development. Page and Shimeles (2015) bemoaned the weak link between growth and poverty reduction in Africa due to failure by growth to create enough good jobs. As a result, three strategies to accelerate poverty reduction in Africa were proposed namely making meaningful investments in agricultural productivity and complementary rural infrastructure, re-orient private-sector development programs to focus more on closing Africa's growing infrastructure and skills gaps with the rest of the world and the third one being developing of new initiatives to grow industry by fostering an export push, supporting the formation of industrial clusters, and strengthening firm capabilities. Banerjee et al (2015) did a study involving six countries namely Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, India, Pakistan, and Peru where productive asset grant, training and support, life skills coaching, temporary cash consumption support, and typically access to savings accounts and health information or service where provided to the very poor. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether a multifaceted graduation program could help the extreme poor establish sustainable self-employment activities and generate lasting improvements in their well-being. After implementing the program for 24 months, it was found that a multifaceted approach to increasing income and well-being for the ultra-poor is sustainable and cost-effective. However despite sustainably improving the warfare of the very poor, the study did not indicate if the target people, who were the very poor, were moved out of poverty. Rodrick (2007) tried to establish linkages between economic growth and poverty reduction and concluded that the central lessons from the past 50 years of development research and policy was that economic growth was the most effective way to pull people out of poverty and deliver on their wider objectives for a better life. Adams & Richard (2003) in the study of 50 developing countries collected at 101 intervals to examine the impact of economic growth on poverty and inequality deduced that 10 percentage point increase in economic growth (measured by survey mean income) resulted in 25.9 percent decrease in the proportion of people living in poverty. Lin (2003) also demonstrated that China alone lifted over 450 million people out of poverty since 1979 of which the evidence showed that rapid economic growth between 1985 and 2001 was crucial to this enormous reduction in poverty. Chatterjee (2005) equally portrayed that of the many factors that are responsible for success in income poverty reduction in Asian and Pacific region countries, economic growth was a dominant factor. Lin (2013) showed empirical results indicating that economic growth in the People's Republic of China (PRC) between 1985 and 2001 was effective in reducing poverty but rising inequality reduced the effectiveness of poverty reduction and retaliated that the development stage with low initial inequality achieved greater poverty reduction from growth, whereas a development stage with high initial inequality required a deeper poverty focus. Mphuka et al (2017) in the estimation of poverty trends in Zambia revealed that at national level, growth was the main driver of reduction in poverty but adverse distribution of consumption that did not favour the poor, limited the impact of growth on poverty and recommended for enhancing redistribution policies that favoured the poor to be as important as the goal of achieving higher growth. Fosu (2011) highlighted that initial levels of inequality limited the effectiveness of growth in reducing poverty and called for special attention to reducing inequality in certain countries where income distribution is especially unfavourable for it to have a meaningful impact on poverty.

Bastagli et al (2016) did a review of 201 studies on cash transfers to determine what the evidence say on cash transfers. The review reflected comparatively large evidence base linking cash transfers to reductions in monetary poverty. The review indicated that cash transfers resulted in increase in total and food expenditure though in most cases the impact was not big enough to have a subsequent effect on aggregate poverty levels.

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Study design and methodology

Thematic and content analysis was used in the study. The focus was on studies done in countries which experienced huge drops in poverty levels such as China. Studies and reports on the performance of poverty reduction programs were reviewed and thematic/content analyses where done on the literature with a view of identifying some common attributes/traits which could have contributed to the success of the poverty reduction interventions. The common traits which could have contributed to the success of the poverty reduction programs were termed as Key Success Factors (KSF) by the researcher. The identified KSF were then assessed for their respective prevalence and incorporation in the Zambia poverty reduction situation. Appropriate policy recommendations were provided thereafter.

Identification of Key Success Factors

From the review of literature, thematic areas were identified to come up with Key Success Factors (KSF) for the poverty reduction interventions. These factors are as outlined below;

Poverty reduction has strong correlation with high economic growth. High economic growth is therefore the first Key Success Factor. All countries which experienced rapid poverty reduction also had high economic growth rate. Drivers of economic growth should therefore be embraced by countries striving to reduce poverty levels. Such drivers could be broad and dependent on main factors such as resource/factor endowment and technology advancement of a particular country. However, Dao (2014) in the study of thirty eight developing countries came up with three factors as major drivers of economic growth. These were gross capital formation and urged governments to devise programs aimed at increasing investment in physical capital, productivity per worker and urged governments to devise policies designed to increase the value added per worker and the third one being technological progress, measured as changes in total factor productivity and urged governments to undertake measures to combine capital, labour, and skills more efficiently. Rahman (2021), explored the driving factors of economic growth in the world's largest economies and concluded that continuous and sustained economic growth is ensured through the formulation of suitable and appropriate trade policy, energy policy, human capital development policy and FDI policy after noting positive and significant impacts trade, energy, human capital and foreign direct investment on the economic growth.

Inclusiveness/pro poor of the economic growth in the midst of low inequality is the second Key Success Factor. Rapid poverty reduction was noted in countries where economic growth was inclusive especially in instances where the poor were at the centre stage of the growth. Amponsah et al (2023) provided empirical evidence depicting that inclusive growth could effectively reduce poverty and inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa. Fosu (2017) noted that growth positively impact on poverty when inequality is low. Growth has limited impact on poverty in the midst of high inequality. Inclusive growth is defined OECD as economic growth that is distributed fairly across society and creates opportunities for all. China experienced rapid poverty reduction because its growth was inclusive and resulted in increased average income mostly for poor people in rural areas and other disadvantaged groups.

Innovative tailor made poverty reduction initiatives is the third Key Success Factor. Most countries which have succeeded in poverty reduction introduced tailor made poverty reduction initiative focusing on the poor. China is one such example which moved the poor in rural areas out of poverty by promoting agriculture and raising the income for farm workers. Malaysia also managed to move most of the people out of poverty through provision of social safety net for the disadvantaged groups. Deliberate efforts to target the poor has assisted in moving the poor out of poverty such as cash transfers and promotion of economic wellbeing of the poor. Malaysia and China are such examples. Each country should clearly understand the underlying issues exacerbating high poverty levels and innovatively coming up with tailor made solutions which are mostly tied to the prevailing local conditions and factor endowments.

Significant level of intervention focusing on the poor is the forth Key Success Factor. Most studies advocate for significant level of interventions aimed at moving the poor out of poverty. Poverty reduction, in this instance, monetary poverty entails moving people from below to the above the provided poverty line. Therefore, any poverty interventions can only be said to be effective if it has the ability to pull the poor from below to the above the poverty line. In some instances, for this to occur, multiple interventions are done focusing on same individuals for purposes of attaining meaningful impact. China is one example which came up with a multipronged approach in the fight against poverty which impacted positively to individual households.

Poverty Reductions Interventions in Zambia in the light of Key Success Factors

Zambia is one of the poorest countries with the low rate of poverty reduction. Current statistics indicate that poverty rates in Zambia stands at 60% (ZAMSTAT). Poverty rates have been have actually been increasing instead of declining in the past 7 years. Poverty rates where at 54.4% in 2015 and rose to 60% in 2022. This is the case despite having poverty reduction programs in place enshrined in the National Development Plans.

Zambia poverty reduction strategies falls short in the light of Key Success Factors (KSF) namely economic growth, inclusive/pro poor of the economic growth, innovative tailor made initiative and size/level of intervention/support. Failure to meet success factors, which should be in place for possible success of poverty reduction strategies, affected the fight against poverty in Zambia. Drivers of economic growth, according to Dao (2014), are gross capital formation, high productivity per worker and technological progress. During the time of implementing the Seventh National Development Plan, which ran from 2017 to 2021, it was noted that gross fixed capital formation was actually declining in Zambia from 10 billion US dollars in 2017 to 6.3 billion US dollars in 2021 (World Bank Meta Data). Zambia has a youthful population of which the majority are unemployed with the rate of unemployment rate, according to the Labour Force Survey Report (2021), standing at 38.8 percent. Unemployment rate is high among the skilled persons, who cannot find jobs, after graduating from universities and colleges. The majority employed are in the agriculture sector but the sector has low productivity. This results in low productivity per worker. Low productivity, especially in the agriculture sector is also due to absence of advanced technologies resulting in most farmers using non-mechanized production systems. Productivity is also constrained by high unemployment rates which results in the unemployed being excluded to contribute to economic growth.

It is therefore recommended that public policy should focus on economic growth as a prerequisite for poverty reduction. Policy options should be provision of an enabling environment which promotes investments from both local and foreign investors. Provision of enabling environment could be by providing catalytic infrastructure targeting potential areas. Such infrastructure could be roads, reliable energy sources and other trade facilitation infrastructure such as cold chains and storage facilities. The high cost of capital and challenges to access such capital in Zambia should also be addressed. Lending rates were averaging twenty six percent for the first quarter in 2023 according to Bank of Zambia data. The Zambian Government can alternatively provide funding to catalytic sectors at lower lending rates. Productivity should also be enhanced by putting up policies which strive to match training of skilled manpower to the job market requirements. Entrepreneurship and promotion of self-employment should be enhanced to overcome the challenge of having huge numbers of unemployed skilled staff who cannot contribute to economic growth. Apart from enhancing productivity by leveraging on labour, productivity can also be enhanced by harnessing on technology. Striving to mechanize agriculture as well as introduction of technologies contributing to high yields could contribute greatly to economic growth given that agriculture employs sixty percent of the Zambian labour force. Production and productivity could also be enhanced through market development especially for agriculture products and policy should focus towards providing an enabling environment for broadening the markets.

Economic growth contributes to poverty reduction if it's inclusive. It is noted that inequality in Zambia is high with the latest Gini coefficient at 0.56. It is also noted that service sector was the highest contributor to GDP growth in Zambia and stood at 58% in 2022 (World Bank Meta data). However, the biggest employer in Zambia is the agriculture sector which had 57% share from total employed and yet only contributed about 3% to GDP (World Bank Meta data). The conclusion therefore could be that smaller portion of the populations are the one benefiting from the fruits of economic growth resulting in high inequality constraining the poverty reduction interventions.

It is therefore recommended that deliberate efforts be made to push investments in the agriculture sector which is the highest employer in Zambia. This could then result in the agriculture sector to contribute more to economic growth which is inclusive. Policy options could include ways of improving productivity in the agriculture sector by addressing all bottlenecks.

Poverty is multifaceted resulting in the need to come up with tailor made solution because strategies used in one country might not work if used in a different country. This is because of a number of differences between countries such as poverty underlying factors as well as factor endowments for the provision of livelihoods. The Seventh National Development Plan highlighted unemployment, underemployment, limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to social services and markets as the main causes of poverty in Zambia . However, no meaningful tailor made initiative have been noted to resolve the causes of poverty in order to mitigate respective effects. Policy should focus on innovatively addressing all the underlying factors causing high poverty levels for any meaningful impact.

Poverty, which is mostly defined in terms of income, is commonly determined by noting the number of people below the provided threshold mostly referred to as the poverty line. All people below the provided threshold are considered to be poor. The Zambia Statistic Agency, which is the institution mandated to provide official statistics for Zambia, has pegged the latest poverty line at K517.6 per adult member per month. Therefore, all those earning or surviving on less than K517.6 per adult member per month are considered to be poor. Poverty reduction interventions in Zambia have failed to lift beneficiaries out of poverty due to low value of the support. Programs such as Social Cash Transfer provide a monthly income of K200 per beneficiaries. This amount is very low compared to the poverty line of K517.6. Other poverty reduction programs such as Food Security Pack and Farmer Input Support Program equally provides less income per household relative to the poverty line. The recommendation therefore is for revision of such programs from poverty mitigation to poverty reduction. It was also noted that such programs only caters for 18% of the poor. Such low coverage cannot make significant impact on poverty levels in a country where 60% of citizens are poor. The recommendation therefore is to increase the coverage.

General Recommendations

The recommendation is to embrace the key success factors in the poverty reduction interventions. The following therefore are the general recommendations;

I. Zambia should strive for high inclusive growth. This will ensure that high economic growth benefits most citizens which is only possible if it's inclusive. The current situation is a paradox where the sector which employs the majority of the citizens contributes the least to economic growth. Agriculture sector in Zambia employs 37.2 percent of the labour force (LCMS, 2022) and only contributes around 2.3 percent to the GDP. Focus therefore is to prioritize agriculture to be a major driver of growth. Strategies should also be devised ensure that the labour force become more productive and contribute to economic growth. LCMS report for 2022 indicates that 68.6 percent of the Zambian population above 12 years were economically inactive meaning that they are not even part of the labour force. From the remaining 31.4 percent of the labour force, 13.1 percent were unemployed. The result therefore indicate that over 70 percent of the Zambian population above 12 years were not contributing anything to economic growth. This resource should be enhanced to have any meaningful impact on poverty levels.

II. Zambia should strive to devise poverty reduction interventions tailored to address the identified root causes of poverty. Unemployment, underemployment, limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to social services and markets were identified in the Seventh National Development Plan (7NDP) as the main causes of poverty in Zambia and yet no innovative plans have been put up to address these root causes. A disjoint was noticed on the devised poverty reduction strategies and the root causes of poverty resulting in ineffectiveness of the devised strategies.

III. Zambia should strive to ensure that poverty reduction interventions are effective by ensuring that beneficiaries of the programs are pulled out of poverty. The interventions should also be capable of reducing the poverty rates by significant margins. The poverty reduction intervention should therefore have adequate/significant level of intervention and coverage. This could be achieve by ensuring that interventions are capable of moving beneficiaries to be above the poverty line. The support should also be provided to a considerable number of the poor for reduction in poverty rates to be significant. The noted poverty reduction interventions in the Seventh National Development Plan (7NDP) such as cash transfer and provision of farming inputs where incapable of moving people out of poverty because of low value of support. Beneficiaries of cash transfers were given K200 per month when the poverty line was K517.6 per month. Income, from those who got support in form of farming inputs, was not enough to make such households to be above the poverty line. The poverty reduction programs in Zambia were only providing support to 18 percent of the total poor.

Conclusion

Poverty reduction had been elusive in Zambia despite some poverty reduction strategies put in place. The poverty rates were seen going up from 54.4% in 2015 to 60% in 2022. To reverse the trends, Zambia should strive to incorporate the key successful factors which are vital for poverty reduction. This can be by embracing factors which could promote inclusive growth and reduction in inequalities. Focus should be in increasing investments in sectors which employs the majority of citizens namely the agriculture sector and ensuring that opportunities are provided to bring on board inactive labour force which is above 70 percent of those who are above 12 years. Underlying factors exacerbating poverty such as unemployment, underemployment, limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to social services and markets should be innovatively dealt with. The poverty reduction programs namely Food Security Pack, Farmer Input Support Program and Social Cash Transfer should be reviewed to make them impactful by ensuring that they become capable of pushing beneficiaries above the poverty line. Looking at the poverty rate of 60% in Zambia, efforts needs to be made to increase the number of beneficiaries under the poverty reduction interventions.

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